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PERSONAL HEALTH DIVISION

For Immediate Release

August 30, 2021

Health Department issues order requiring masks in grades K-12 *Safety of children, staff and in-person learning are goals*

On Friday, Aug. 27, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department issued a [Public Health Order](#) requiring universal masking in grades K-12 for all school districts within the department's two county jurisdiction of Benzie and Leelanau counties. The order requires all persons, regardless of vaccination status – students, staff, and visitors – to properly and consistently wear a face mask while inside any enclosed building or structure of the institution.

The order remains in effect until Health Department officials determine that risk trends have consistently improved, using such indicators as transmission level, vaccination coverage, hospital capacity, and public health capacity. This order is issued pursuant to the Michigan Public Health Code, MCL 333.2451 and 333.2453, as well as R. 325.175(4), which is an administrative rule promulgated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services pursuant to MCL 333.2226(d).

“Local public health departments have a duty to protect the public’s health,” said Lisa Peacock, Health Officer. “After thoughtful consideration, we took this action due to several key factors, with the number one goal of helping schools maintain in-person learning in a safe and healthy environment,” she said.

Between August 3-27, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department reported 131 total cases of COVID-19 and 2 deaths – an increase of 274% compared to 35 cases in July. The Delta variant, the most common strain of COVID-19 in Michigan, is highly transmissible and the risk of transmission remains elevated among unvaccinated persons in schools.

In addition to the large increase in the number of cases, local hospital authorities are reporting a sharp uptick in COVID-19 cases, resulting in a strain on capacity including limited ICU beds, extremely long wait times in emergency departments, and lacking capacity to fully serve ALL patients, sometimes necessitating ambulance transport of patients to downstate hospitals which further strains local EMS capacity.

“The most effective way to prevent transmission in schools is to support being vaccinated,” said Dr. Josh Meyerson, Medical Director. “Achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students, as well as teachers, staff, and household members, is the most critical strategy to help schools stay open safely. Students younger than 12 years of age are currently ineligible to receive the vaccination. Masking, along with other mitigation measures, can prevent a significant number of new infections among students, secondary cases in their households, and reduce the number of missed days of school due to illness, isolation, or quarantine,” Dr. Meyerson said.

In addition to personal protection from others, a face mask captures the mask wearer's exhaled respiratory droplets and aerosols that may contain the virus from being breathed in by others. Given that the virus can spread from infected people who do not appear sick, masks remain essential to everyone. In addition to masks and vaccination, a layered protection strategy helps ensure a healthy learning environment, allowing students the best chance to remain healthy and physically present in the classroom setting.

This order is consistent with the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians for indoor face masks for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Health department officials also support the CDC and MDHHS recommendations that

everyone – fully vaccinated and unvaccinated – wear a mask indoors in public if in an area of substantial or high community transmission. The order is also consistent with and assists schools in complying with their statutory obligation to provide for the safety and welfare of pupils while at school or a school sponsored activity or while enroute to or from school or a school-sponsored activity.

The health department is offering free COVID-19 testing with the support of HONU lab. The test is free, and no doctor's order is required. Pre-registration is not required, but it is recommended to reduce time spent at the testing clinic, and walk-ins are welcome. Testing is available:

- On Thursdays from 12 - 6 pm at the Suttons Bay Old Middle School. To register visit: <http://honumg.info/OldSuttonsBayMS>
- On Fridays from 10 am – 3 pm at the Crystal Café in Benzonia. To register visit: <https://honumg.info/CrystalCafe>

Vaccination is our most powerful tool. Everyone is welcome at all health department clinics, including residents and non-residents. All three COVID-19 vaccines are available at every clinic. Minors must be accompanied by a parent/legal guardian. Public health nurses are on-site at these events and able to answer any questions about the vaccines. All clinics are open to walk-ins, or an appointment can be scheduled by clicking on the clinic link below:

Tuesday, August 31st

- Suttons Bay Middle School Gymnasium, 310 S. Elm Street, Suttons Bay, MI 49682
- Time: 10:00-2:00pm
- Vaccine: Moderna, Janssen, and Pfizer (open to 12 or older, parent/guardian must accompany minor)
- To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

Wednesday, September 1st

- Crystal Cafe, 1681 Benzie Hwy, Benzonia, MI 49616
- Time: 2:00- 6:00pm
- Vaccine: Moderna, Janssen, and Pfizer (open to 12 or older, parent/guardian must accompany minor)
- To schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)

COVID-19 Case Counts

The Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is reporting the following case information:

- On Friday, August 27, 7 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Benzie (3), and Leelanau (4).
- On Saturday, August 28, 5 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Benzie (1), and Leelanau (4).
- On Sunday, August 29, 1 new case of COVID-19 was reported in Benzie (1), and Leelanau (0).
- Today, August 30, 2 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Benzie (1) and Leelanau (1).

As of 4:00 p.m. today, the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department is reporting:

- Total COVID-19 cases in the following counties: Benzie– 1,325, Leelanau– 1,373
- Active COVID-19 cases in the following counties: Benzie– 50, Leelanau– 77
- Recovered COVID-19 cases in the following counties: Benzie– 1,241, Leelanau– 1,278
- Confirmed COVID-19 deaths in the following counties: Benzie – 34, Leelanau– 18
- Hospitalized: 177 total; 4 currently

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